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ABSTRACT

Examining the meaning of lifelong learning within the context of "community" (defined in terms of interests and locality), the author explores many learning resources and opportunities and identifies related research questions. The content of this study is presented in three sections. The first section on the community as a setting for lifelong learning discusses different ways of defining community and lifelong learning. Section 2 covers current happenings in the community and their implications for the lifelong learning movement, including non-traditional educational opportunities, ADELL (Adult Education and Lifelong Learning Clearinghouse), tax credit for tuition, worker's sabbatical, self-planned learning, and reverse migration. The last section discusses six priority research topics and for each one presents several questions that need answering. Brief description of two examples of efforts to activate the educative community is attached. (EM)

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THE COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE FOR RESEARCH ON LIFELONG LEARNING

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The Community Perspective For Research On Lifelong Learning

Roger Hiemstra
Iowa State University

The rapidly growing lifelong learning movement has prompted educators to look more closely at the community as a setting for learning because of the natural proximity and the many resources available to learners. Although many lifelong learning opportunities currently exist in most communities, the long range success of the movement may depend on the use by people of a wide variety of resources outside institutional confines. This activation of the educative community notion implies that the entire community is a living laboratory for learning.

There are many related research questions:

1. How can a better use be made of untapped resources for learning?
2. What is the relationship individuals have with their community?
3. More must be known about self-planned, individual learning efforts at the community level.
4. What are the effects of constantly changing communities on lifelong learning opportunities and individual attitudes?
5. What are the needs of special or minority groups and the usefulness of currently available community resources for their learning needs.
6. How can interagency cooperation and communication be improved?

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THE COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE FOR RESEARCH ON LIFELONG LEARNING

Purpose

A dynamic, growing area of interest is the lifelong learning movement. Backed by legislative and funding support in several countries, continuous growth in the amount of learning being undertaken by adults, and research findings which further clarify learning needs and activity, the lifelong learning arena provides an exciting mileau for study, discussion, and planning. The purpose of this symposium is to provide some background information in and to suggest some needed research for better understanding how societies can respond to future lifelong learning pressures.

The purpose of this paper as one part of the symposium is to examine the meaning of lifelong learning within the context of interest-based and locality-based communities. The community with its many learning resources and opportunities will be described. In addition, research issues will be identified for extending the knowledge base about the community as a setting for meeting the lifelong learning needs of adults. It is anticipated that such research will assist future planners and developers of lifelong learning opportunities to work more effectively within the constraints of limited resources.

The Community as a Setting for Lifelong Learning

What is a community? That is an interesting question to ask and a difficult one to answer. The difficulty lies in that many writers have attempted to define community or to describe what makes up a community -- consequently, there are many, often conflicting ways of identifying or defining

the term. The word community comes from the Latin word "communis", meaning fellowship or common relations and feelings. Many people more easily recognize it in its common meaning as a body of fellows or fellow townsmen. This definition is useful today, since most people probably will define community as a hometown, place of residence, or neighborhood. "I live in Toronto, Ontario," for example, or "I live in West Des Moines, Iowa." There are also many ways of examining the meaning of community beyond a locality reference. This does not mean that the community as a geographical or locality base is dying out; rather, the nature of the community is complex and changing. Thus, precision is required if the meaning of community is to be understood well enough for effective living and survival in a situation of change.

One of the least precise ways of describing the community is to place it at either of two opposite poles -- for example, a rural versus urban community. However, on a considerably higher scale of precision, a community can be described strictly on the basis of locality. One such definition is the organization of various social activities and units in a manner so that the daily living of a set of people is facilitated. As Figure 1 shows, (page 3) this definition allows the lifelong learning programmer to establish some sort of geographical boundaries for purposes of determining needs, planning and publicizing activities, and delivering services to people; however, the degree of precision in defining such boundaries can be determined by whatever constraints are imposed on the programmer, such as school district boundaries, a neighborhood school zone, legislated community college areas, etc.

A third manner in which the community needs to be thought of, and one requiring a different form of precision, is to look at both the horizontal and vertical axes of a locality. This framework developed by Roland Warren

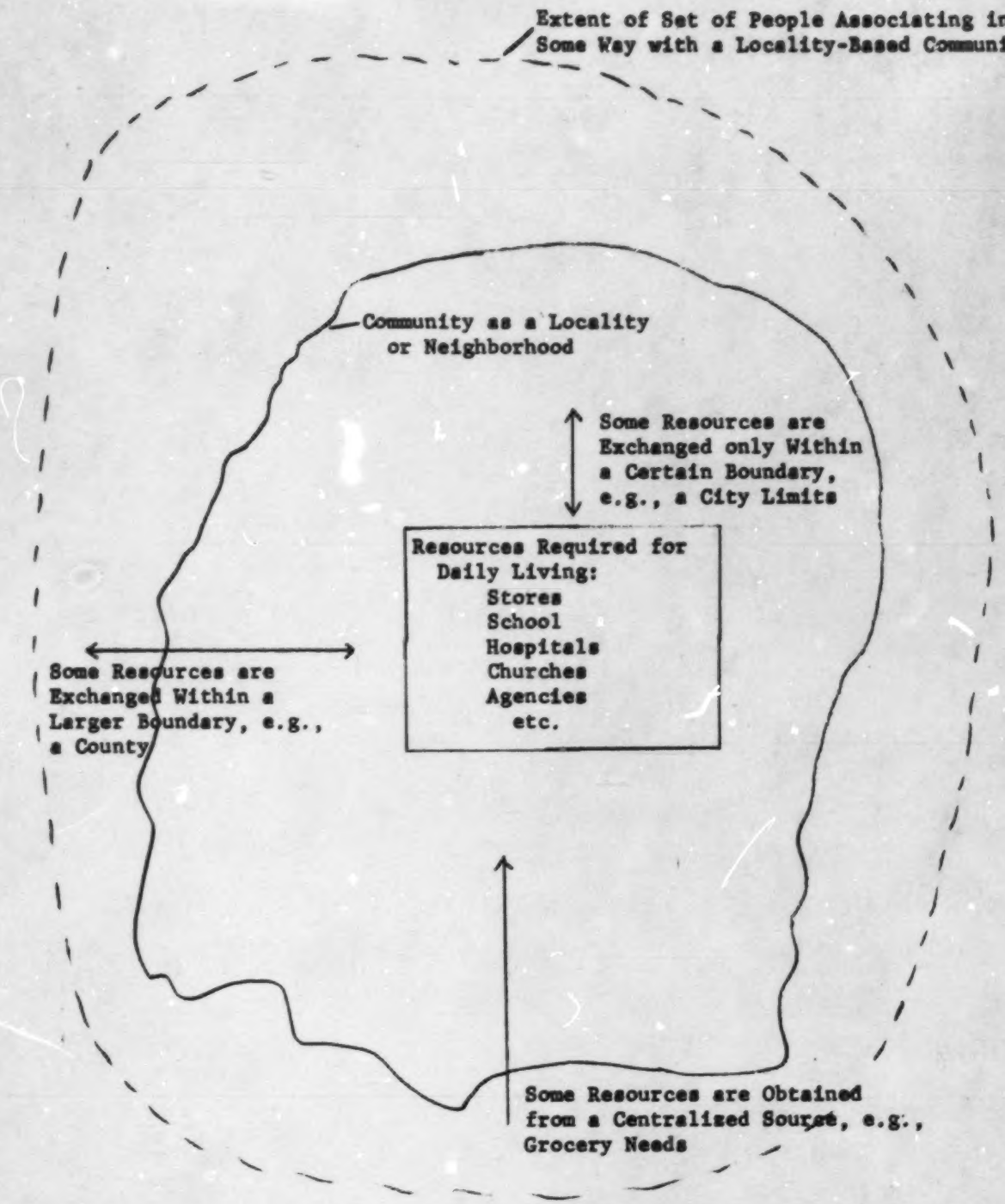
Extent of Set of People Associating in Some Way with a Locality-Based Community
Community as a Locality or Neighborhood
Some Resources are Exchanged only Within a Certain Boundary, e.g., a City Limits
Resources Required for Daily Living:
Stores
School
Hospitals
Churches
Agencies
etc.
Some Resources are Exchanged Within a Larger Boundary, e.g., a County
Some Resources are Obtained from a Centralized Source, e.g., Grocery Needs

Figure 1. DEFINING THE COMMUNITY AS A LOCALITY BASE

is somewhat abstract, but it allows for the shared interests and patterns of behavior of people in and out of a locality base to be considered by the lifelong learning professional. For example, as Figure 2 (page 5) shows, the planner of continuing medical education could meet local,state, regional, and even national needs. However, it is important to realize that analyzing and meeting vertical or interest-level lifelong learning needs requires a type of precision considerably different from that required at the horizontal level.

The main point of the above discussions is that each person will need to define community in a manner suitable to his or her own situation. For the remainder of this paper, the locality notion of community will be the prevailing definitional base. However, it is important to note that much research is required to more fully understand what meaning of community is required to program effectively within the context of the lifelong learning movement.

An important reason for talking about the community as a setting for lifelong learning hopefully is obvious: it is the setting at which the majority of learning takes place. Several recognizable programming sources currently exist to facilitate such activity. Known by different titles depending on the region or country, some of the most recognizable organizations dealing with lefelong learning activities include those working with adult education, adult basic education, community education,community or junior college education, and university extension. However, such organizations primarily provide programs for people.

The long range success of the lifelong learning movement may well depend on moving the programming efforts more toward the notion of programming with and

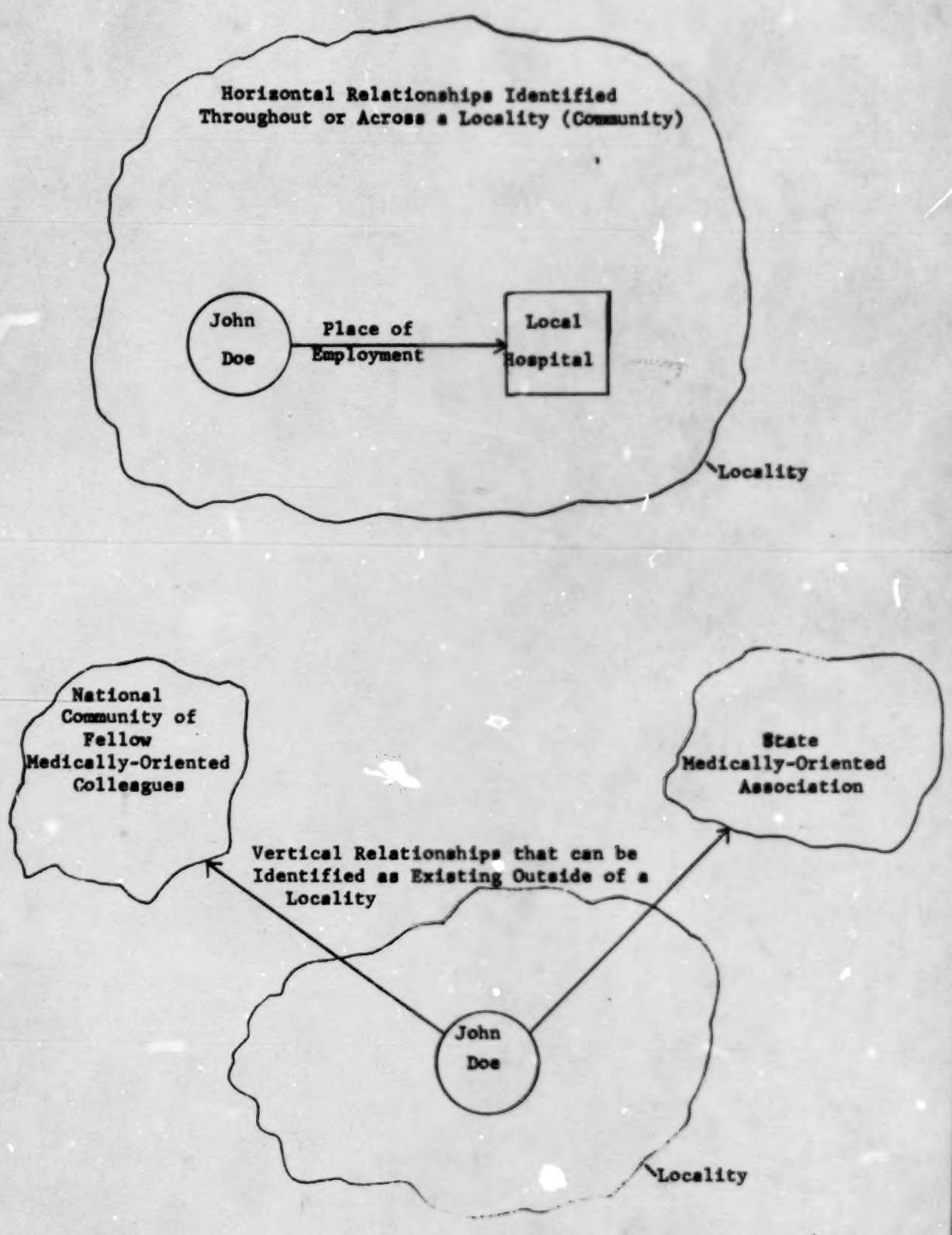

Figure 2. HORIZONTAL AND VERTICAL COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

by people. The author has described elsewhere (see the bibliography) this notion by referring to it as the need to activate the educative community. It is based on the belief that many resources in a community available for the promotion of lifelong learning are terribly underused. Another way of conceptualizing this notion is to state that the entire community is a living laboratory for learning. Both Richardson and Rogers in other papers for this symposium talk about the need to identify and use all kinds of resources at the community level to meet local or special learning needs. Attachment A describes some efforts that have been tried to activate the educative community.

Sell, in his paper for this symposium, conceptualizes the essential aspects for describing adult learning opportunities (see his Figure 1). Within the context of the above educative community theme, lifelong learning also can be described in terms of opportunities within and without the community environment. Figure 3 (page 7) depicts such a conceptualization. The seeking out and use of resources in both formal and informal ways, as the arrow flows are intended to depict, corresponds with the type of findings described by Tough in the remaining symposium paper. As he points out, adult learners in fact make use of every available resource including each other.

Perhaps the most important implication to be derived from the activating the educative community notion is the suggestion that lifelong learning programmers must begin to conceive of their roles in more non-traditional ways. Lifelong learning begins in the home, is reinforced by the schools, but it is perpetuated in the community.

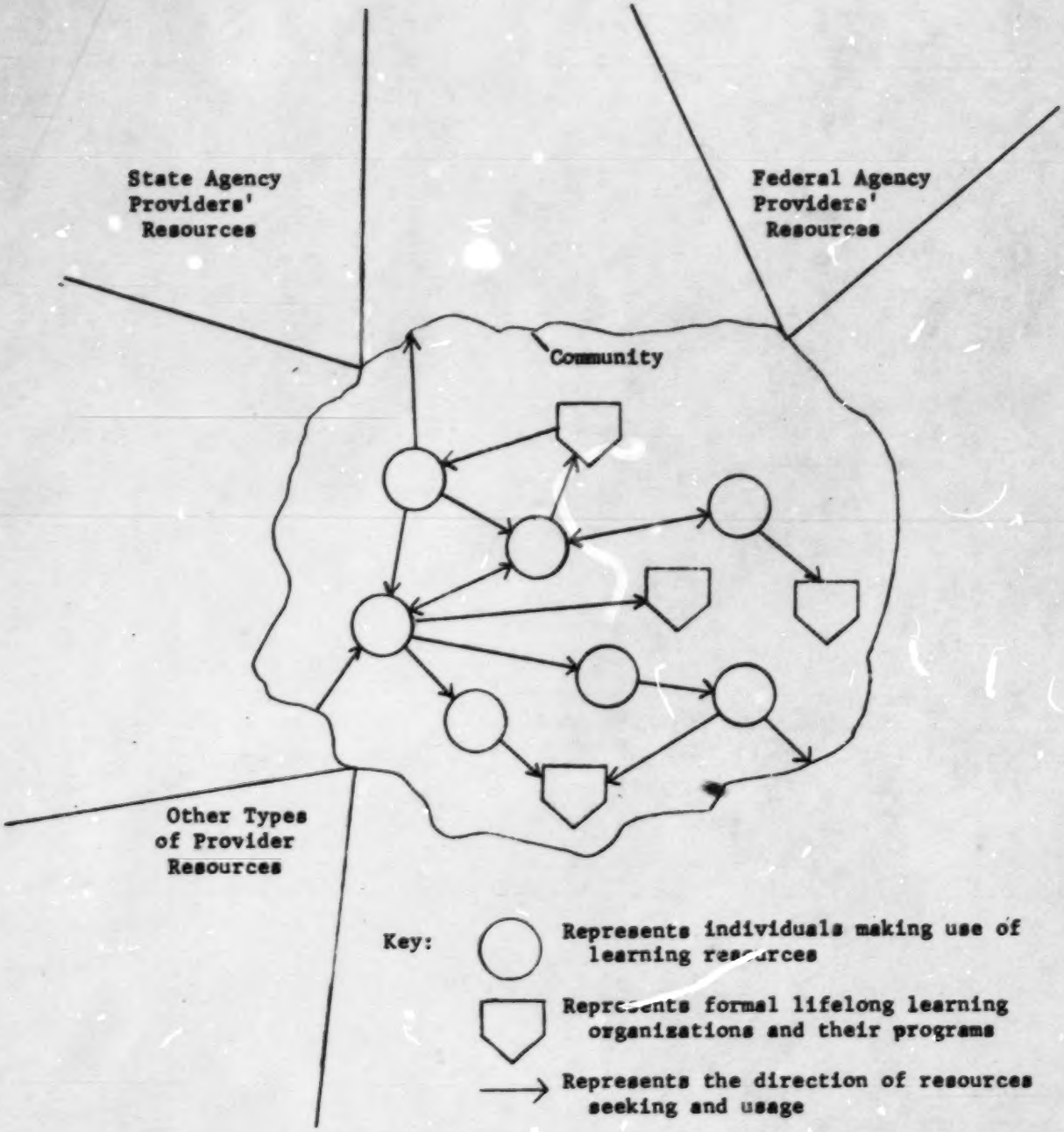
State Agency Providers' Resources
Federal Agency Providers' Resources
Community
Other Types of Provider Resources
Key:
Represents individuals making use of learning resources
Represents formal lifelong learning organizations and their programs
Represents the direction of resources seeking and usage

Figure 3. LIFELONG LEARNER USES OF AVAILABLE RESOURCES WITHIN AND WITHOUT OF THE COMMUNITY

Current Happenings in the Community

The above section title was selected to represent the fact that today's community is in a dynamic, evolving state. There are many "happenings" that have suggestable but sometimes unknown implications for the entire lifelong learning movement. The purpose of this section is to describe several of these evolving forces or actual activities and some of the possible implication as a prelude to the final section on research needs and priorities. Most of the discussion will focus on the United States; however, there are obvious relationships to other countries.

Non-traditional educational opportunities continue to increase. As one example, the University of Mid America has invested millions into the development of home study opportunities, mostly through television courses with accompanying correspondence study. At what point these type of opportunities will become competitive with local providers of programs is not clear, but community based lifelong learning planners should be involved in some way with all forms of education for adults.

ADELL, an Adult Education and Lifelong Learning Clearinghouse, is now reality in the United States. By the fall of 1978, community residents anywhere in the country will have available to them a toll free line for obtaining information and assistance regarding learning opportunities. This is only one of several similar clearinghouse organizations. The implications in the long run regarding who citizens turn to for assistance and information are conjectural at this point. Appropriate research is needed to understand better the impact they will have.

Tax credit for tuition, "entitlement," open entrance - open exit to schools, and community education are only a few of the "concepts" related to lifelong learning that are receiving legislative attention. Like the lifelong learning legislation, it may be only a matter of time before several of these ideas receive support throughout the United States. Educators of the community level need to begin now to think through the many implication related to the use of facilities, the need for trained adult educators, the financial support required, etc.

Worker's sabbatical is a concept where an employee would receive periodic release with pay from the job for personal or professional improvement. Several unions now routinely put such an idea in their initial contract askings. As such an idea becomes reality in the Unites States, along with the early retirement of many, increased leisure, and an aging population, the implications in terms of being able to meet the anticipated learning pressures in each community are many.

Self-planned learning has always been a reality but the recent attention focused on self initiated education through the research efforts of Tough and many others deserves a close look by community based educators. Certainly, more must be understood regarding how such learning relates to the more traditional lifelong learning programs currently available.

Reverse migration of people from urban to rural areas after decades of rural to urban movement is a trend in certain parts of the United States noted by several demographers. This change plus the declining number of youth throughout the country is rapidly changing the educational focus in many

communities. The implications in terms of lifelong learning needs are numerous. However, so are the potential problems and adjustment traumas numerous.

There are so many more emerging community forces and needs that could be described in this section. Increasing crime, pollution, and inflation, the need for better coordination of educational opportunities, the awareness of adult counseling needs in terms of learning, greater citizen involvement, and the changing family and value structure all have ramifications for community-based educators. Hopefully, this symposium will stimulate more thinking, reflection, and activities in terms of the many implications suggested and those that need to be derived.

Suggested Priority Research Topics

This symposium should also stimulate some interest in carrying out research on lifelong learning. There are numerous opportunities and a huge need for such research at the community level. This section will suggest some priority research topics that emerge in the author's mind. Following each topic will be several questions that need answering.

1. A better understanding of the educative community concept is required. Activating the educative community in terms of identifying needs and resources, matching lefelong learners with opportunities, and training educators to deal effectively with adult learners will be a major undertaking in most communities.
   --What is needed to train parents on how to better utilize the community in the education of their children?
   --How can citizens be utilized more in such functions as policy making, program planning, and serving as resource persons?

--What role changes would be required of educators and trainers of educators in an educative community setting?

2. Building on priority research point number three suggested by Sell, a better understanding of the relationship each individual has with her or his community is needed.

--What are the different vertical and horizontal pulls on a person? What effect do such variables as bedroom community versus small town community, newness to community, financial health of the individual, or age of the individual have on lifelong learning needs or participation?

--What agencies or institutions are best suited or most capable of reaching community residents regarding learning opportunities, especially in very small communities with no schools or in large city apartment building complexes?

3. More must be known at the community level about the self-planned learning project activity described by Tough. For example, in a learning project research effort by the author with older people in Nebraska, rural and urban residents carried out significantly more learning projects than did small town residents; however all of the reasons why are not known.

--What are some differences in self-planned learning project activity in relation to size of community, type of community, amount of higher education opportunity in the community, geographic location of the community, etc.?

--What are some of the public policy issues related to self initiated

learning in communities? How should lifelong learning professionals facilitate or relate to such learning activity? What learning resources need to be developed by tax supported educational agencies?

4. Communities are constantly changing. For example, some communities continue to decline while others are continuously growing, even connecting with other growing communities and forming recognizable megalopolis. The concept of "neighborhood" also is constantly changing. Much more needs to be known about the effect of such changes on lifelong learning opportunity and attitudes.

   --Is the reverse migration of people from urban back to rural areas taking place throughout the United States? What are the reasons for such changes?

   --If the population of the United States continues to increase its average age, what effect will this have on communities, learning resources, and learning activity?

   --Withing this mileau of constant change, what community change or social action methodologies are most effective or appropriate?

5. The lifelong learning movement has included the recognition that there are numerous audiences to whom agencies must respond. Older learners, women, disadvantaged adults, minority populations, and the worker as lifelong learner are only some of these special audiences. Much more needs to be known about their learning needs, their response to traditional programming, and the usefulness of currently available community resources for learning.

6. Considerable attention throughout this symposium has been given to the need for better linkages between the various agencies in communities who deal in some way with lifelong learning. The various clearinghouse activities, the terminology handbook for lifelong learning being developed by Sell and others, and various model efforts throughout the United Stated to promote cooperation are hopeful signs. However, much more needs to be known about interagency coordination needs, duplication of programming, competition for students, and effective utilization of scarce resources.

* * * * * * * *

This paper has attempted to describe the community, the dynamic nature of the community, and the need to understand more about lifelong learning activity, demand, and opportunity. Several research needs were described. However, by no means were all the important research questions identified. Hopefully, the stimulations deriveable from the symposium will generate some research necessary to understand and facilitate the lifelong learning movement.

ATTACHMENT A

EXAMPLES OF SOME EFFORTS TO ACTIVATE

THE EDUCATIVE COMMUNITY

One example of some efforts to activate the educative community relates to work I planned with several elementary teachers in southwest Iowa. Through a workshop and some individual consultation they were helped to identify several people, organizations, and industries in their community interested in sharing in the education process. Students visit places of work, individuals come into the classroom to share their expertise on a variety of subjects, and teachers have gone out to industries and video taped activities which are later shown in the classroom. The end result is that the teachers, parents, and community have worked together, the teachers have built a coordinated curriculum around the community resources, and the school's administrators have supported their activities.

The second example relates to how some 300 graduate students in adult education who as a learning activity in some of the author's classes have carried out activating the educative community projects in Nebraska and Iowa. These have all been built around the premise that untapped resources for education exist in each community. The mini-projects have included such activities as:

* A bank that includes information about lifelong learning opportunities in the community in its monthly statement mailings.
* A grain elevator operator that now works with the County Extension Agent to create a monthly display board of information and bulletins about agriculture.
* A dentist that has an automatic audio tape of preventative dental education the receptionist switches callers to, if she needs to put them on hold.
* A small town laundromat that dispenses free bulletins on laundering and clothing care.

* A retired gentleman in a small Nebraska town whose hobby is Indian folk lore -- he now regularly teaches about the folk lore in both the town's elementary school and nursing home.

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